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Barbara Thomas Coventry
University of Toledo

Marietta Morrissey
University of Toledo

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Contested Workplace: The Case of the Strike of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union versus Meijer

BARBARA THOMAS COVENTRY
MARIETTA MORRISSEY

University of Toledo
Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work

This paper examines the struggle between labor and management at four, newly-opened supermarket/discount stores, culminating in a strike. It considers workplace control as an issue in the strike and its resolution. Edwards' typology of workplace control is reviewed, along with other indirect forms of control explored in recent literature. Workers complained most stridently about direct control mechanisms. Workers' objections to technical and bureaucratic control played only a minor part in workers' decision to strike and the work stoppage's outcome. Indirect controls, including customer and gender-specific control mechanisms, were seldom questioned or acknowledged by workers. On the other hand, both the union and management recognized that customer support can influence the course and outcome of a strike. The settlement of this eight-and-one-half week strike resulted in slightly improved wages and benefits and modification of some elements of direct control.

Employers attempt to obtain desired work behavior from their employees and thus increase profits by creating structures of control in the workplace. Employer success in creating structures of control depends upon their relative strength and that of their workers (Edwards 1979). Among the ways workers can resist their employers' power over them are work slow-downs, workplace sabotage, and strikes. Thus, employers want to institute sufficient control mechanisms to elicit the proper behavior from employees and to forestall more dramatic expressions of worker power. However, if employers exercise too much control, workers

will resist and employers' goal of procuring work from their employees will be hurt. In this paper we explore how systems of control affected workers at a supermarket/discount chain and the role that control mechanisms played in a work stoppage.

This case study focuses on Meijer, Inc. and its efforts to control workers as the company expanded into the Toledo area and established four new stores. Besides the employer and workers, a third party, the United Food and Commercial Workers' Union (UFCW) that represents the workers, defined issues of significance in the strike. The UFCW conducted contract negotiations with Meijer, Inc. on the employees' initial contract. When negotiations broke down, the union led an eight-and-one-half week strike against the Toledo-area Meijer stores.

The discussion is based on interviews with forty randomly selected workers about the organization of work at Meijer and workers' strike interests. Some respondents struck against the company; some did not strike. We also interviewed supermarket managers, UFCW officials, and workers in other supermarkets. All interviews were conducted by the authors and lasted from 20 minutes to more than one hour. We reviewed rosters of union members at the Meijer stores following the strike, the Meijer employee handbook, and newspaper reports on the strike.

Systems of Control

Employers and their managers develop systems of control to increase profits by "obtaining the desired work behavior from workers" (Edwards 1979: 17). The means of control may be direct or indirect. Direct or simple controls require employers and/or their agents to closely supervise their workers and continually give their workers instructions. Because direct controls are the more blatant form of control, workers' resistance (e.g., a strike) may arise from or be directed at these mechanisms. Efforts to control workers' behavior can continue, even as workers take action to resist management's demands.

Indirect controls involve the use of impersonal, formalized mechanisms to obtain desired behavior from workers (Blau 1968). They are less visible to workers because they are embedded in the structure of the workplace, instead of resting directly in

the hands of employers and their managers, supervisors, and foremen. Managers may indirectly control workers by burying the mechanisms in the physical structure of the labor process (i.e., technical controls) or in its social structure (i.e., bureaucratic controls; Edwards 1979; also see Bacharach and Bamberger 1995).

Early labor process theorists (Braverman 1974; Edwards 1979) focused on manufacturing because it was expanding, although they briefly discussed retailing. As the service sector grew and became the dominant sector in the economy, analysts (Fuller and Smith 1991; Gottfried 1991; 1992; Leidner 1993) examined control issues in service jobs more thoroughly. Edwards' (1979) assertion that direct control is still dominant in retailing is simplistic (Benson 1986; Fuller and Smith 1991; Leidner 1993). In her examination of a fast-food industry, Leidner (1993) found that all three types of control—direct, technical, and bureaucratic—identified by Edwards (1979) existed at McDonald's. However, customer-worker interaction also constitute another form of control over "interactive service workers"—those who interact directly with the service recipients.

The transformation of the economy to service-based has increased the opportunities for management to adopt more subjective controls (Gottfried 1992; Smith 1994). Managers in sales occupations and other selected occupations may manipulate workers' emotions, personalities, and minds (Hochschild 1983). Employers, especially in service areas, feel empowered to require workers to perform emotional labor because as Chase (1978: 140) noted: "Any interaction with the customer makes the direct worker in fact part of the product, and therefore his [or her] attitude can affect the customers' point of view of the service." This emotional labor that workers perform may be directed at their customers and themselves (Hochschild 1983). For example, Meijer follows a common service-sector practice of referring to its customers as "guests." Leidner (1993: 129) argued that McDonald's management instituted this practice to reinforce the view that "all customers were entitled to respectful and courteous treatment and that workers were there to serve them."

Labor analysts have extended our view of control mechanisms in ways other than acknowledging customer control mechanisms, recognizing such worker characteristics as gender

(Gottfried 1992; Lee 1993; Smith 1994). Acker (1990: 145–46) stated that “the control of the work process . . . [is] always affected by symbols of gender, process of gender identity, and material inequalities between women and men.” Men and women often differ in their responsiveness to management’s directions (Smith 1994), and these directives can involve such work behaviors that managers try to control as resistance, disruptive and argumentative conduct, and unionizing (Edwards 1979). For example, some employers have favored employing women because they believe women are more easily controlled and less likely to unionize (Ehrenreich and Fuentes 1981; Cobble 1993).

Workers at the Toledo-area-Meijer stores were subject to all of these mechanisms of control: direct/simple, technical, bureaucratic, customer, and gender. In the following sections we describe these mechanisms, how they operated at these Meijer stores, and what, if any, role that they played in the strike.

Workplace Control and the Meijer Strike

Direct Control

Direct control is the oldest, simplest form of worker control and is associated with relatively small entrepreneurial firms (Edwards 1979). Meijer Inc.’s roots are as a small, privately-owned company that dates back to 1934 when Hendrick Meijer started his first store in Greenville, Michigan. Over the years, the family-owned business opened additional stores, spreading into small towns across western Michigan (Meijer 1984). In 1994 Meijer had 81 stores in three states, about 55,000 employees and gross sales of \$3.5 million (“Meijer looks . . .” 1994). Today the company has over 95 stores. This expansion includes four stores in the Toledo area that opened in 1993. Despite this tremendous growth, Meijer remained a private company and, as a manager described the firm, “very secretive.” He went on to say, “That’s the way they [top management] like it and that’s the way they want to keep it. They teach us to be that way.”

Meijer’s closed management style is compatible with direct controls because concealing information places more power in the hands of those people who have the information (i.e., management). It allows managers much discretion in their direction

of workers (Edwards 1979). Workers described elements of this personal type of control: "First, they try to make you feel like a family. They tell you you're part of Fred Meijer's family, the Meijer's family. If you don't do exactly as they prescribe, then they try through intimidation." Another worker described management as "always on our backs to do more and more and more, just kind of slave drivers."

Because direct controls are subject to the whims of those in charge, they can be "erratic, and subject to favoritism and arbitrariness" (Edwards 1979: 27). These types of decisions played a part in the strike. Indeed, both striking workers and union officials stressed the importance of the issue of what they called treatment, but were in fact issues of direct control. For example, many of the workers we interviewed complained of arbitrary decisions in the day-to-day operations of their stores, a significant form of control. Striking workers contended that managers gave favored workers more hours and at preferable times.

Brown nosers would get the extra hours . . . They were allowed to get over-time. . . . They were allowed holidays off. I've worked there for a year and a half and I had one holiday off. And that was only because they were closed. And I've got top seniority in the store.

This service-desk worker went on to say that for "unfavored" workers, overtime could have serious ramifications.

If they would ask me to stay over, or if we were busy and I couldn't leave . . . , I would have to let them know early enough in the week so that they could cut my schedule. . . . If I clocked in 15 minutes overtime, that would be at time-and-a-half. They would take disciplinary action by writing you up and putting it in your file. If you get enough of these, then you would get time off without pay, and enough of them, you'd lose your job.

Some workers that we interviewed reported other instances of management's inconsistent enforcement of company rules. One cashier explained that if a cashier's drawer was short of cash, Meijer's policy stated that he or she would be off for three days. However, for some workers the manager "would say, 'Well, you've been off Monday and Tuesday, that was two days off. Next Thursday's your next day off, and it's your next day off.'" Thus,

with favored workers management may count regular days off as part of their suspension. But as the cashier went on to explain: "Another girl, possibly is a part-timer, or [someone who] has a personality conflict with one of the managers, or they just didn't like her, they'd bring her in the office and give her three days off without pay." It was these workers' hope that their union could help protect them from managers' use of direct control mechanisms, such as the arbitrary disciplining of workers.

Workers also believed that Meijer management controlled them by misleading them about its willingness to pay workers in Toledo wages comparable to other unionized grocery-store employees in the area. This led to an impasse between the company and the union (Morrissey and Coventry 1996). When entering the Toledo area, Meijer met with UFCW representatives to discuss union representation. Meijer allowed the UFCW to give a membership talk to the workers. A union organizer told us that Meijer was aware of the higher wage/benefit standards in the Toledo area and indicated that they would meet them in their Toledo stores. Several workers reported to us that Meijer had given them the same impression about wages. One woman said that when she interviewed for her job at Meijer, the company representative told her "'the union was coming in and wages would go up tremendously.'" During contract negotiations, however, Meijer's wage proposals fell below those earned by Meijer's unionized competitors. For example, Meijer offered to pay their top cashiers \$6.70 an hour, which was \$3.30 below the rate for top cashiers at Kroger, Food Town, and Cub grocery stores (Pakulski 1994a).

Sticking points in the contract negotiations went beyond wage issues. The union took exception to management's proposals for health insurance that required workers to pay a large portion of their premiums and a pension plan that did not cover the entire workforce. Another point of contention was the company's policy that gave part-time workers little chance to become full-time (Pakulski 1994b). Striking workers and union officials also emphasized the importance of worker treatment—a product of Meijer's direct control mechanism. Contract negotiations eventually broke down, and on April 27 the UFCW membership at

Meijer voted to authorize a strike by a margin of 596 to 107 to begin May 10 at 12:01 a.m. (Pakulski 1994b).

Meijer's direct-control efforts increased as negotiations deteriorated, and worker resistance grew. Meijer, Inc. prepared for the strike by hiring 100 additional private security guards from the Vance International's Asset Production Team. Both newspaper accounts and interviews of workers indicate that these security officers proved to be a source of concern to workers. Three days before the scheduled start of the strike, workers "flooded" their union hall with complaints that the private security officers were harassing union members (Henry 1994). Emphasizing the negative treatment workers received, some of the workers we interviewed referred to the APT guards as the "goon squad," and saw them as an example of management's attempts at intimidation.

Here we were cashiers and clerks out there [on the picket line], and they were treating us like Teamsters and longshoremen. They had goons out there, hired in from Virginia in their paramilitary uniforms, standing at attention all the time, shooting cameras at us. They've got video tape on every one of us.

Another union supporter told us:

When I first started my union activities, promoting people to sign up and be union members, giving out registration cards, I was followed to my area . . . I had people watch me. I had people follow me to the break room, sit in on my conversations, follow me to the bathroom. It got to the point where they followed me home. They would sit outside our house.

At 4:00 p.m. on May 7, the day workers inundated their UFCW local with complaints, union officials decided to strike early. An hour later, workers at one of the stores began walking out. By 5:20 union members at the other three stores were joining them. The union reported strong support by the workers on the job that afternoon. They claimed that 75 to 85 percent of the members walked out of three of the stores. Only about half of workers could leave the fourth store before the APT guards locked employees inside (Henry 1994).

Walking off the job did not eliminate some workers' concerns about Meijer's efforts to control workers through intimidation. Additional incidents occurred on the picket line. A striking

cashier indicated that the APT guards kicked, stoned and shouted obscenities at the picketers. In an attempt to protect their striking workers, the union filed a complaint of harassment and intimidation against Meijer, Inc. and APT security firm on May 26, requesting a restraining order against them. That same day the litigants agreed on an order to prohibit mistreatment of picketers. Meijer's spokesperson Brian Breslin indicated that the agreement should not be viewed as an admission of any wrong-doing, and that they stood behind the security firm they hired. A newspaper account quoted Breslin as saying,

We continue to maintain that Asset Protection Team is a highly professional and disciplined labor-dispute security organization and are highly suspect of any accusation of improper conduct with regard to any APT employees (quoted to Pakulski 1994c: 37).

A union member we interviewed spoke bitterly a few months after the strike ended about her experiences at Meijer. She emphasized that the strike was as much about the treatment of workers as wages and benefits, and was concerned that problem of worker treatment was not rectified. "Better treatment is very important. . . . We filed over forty unfair labor practice charges against Meijer's, and they were very serious. They were not addressed at all. They were dropped. So what has Meijer's learned from this?"

Thus, efforts at direct control, along with wage and benefit issues, contributed to the strike and influenced Meijer's reactions to the strike. Technical and bureaucratic controls also concerned workers, though less dramatically than direct mechanisms.

Technical Control

Employers developed technical control to direct, evaluate, and sanction workers indirectly by hiding the means of control in the physical structure of the workplace. At Meijer, the structure of the stores function as a control mechanism. The supermarket industry has added more and more product lines and services, such as a pharmacy, salad bar, lunch counter, video rental, ticket sales (Walsh 1993; Mayo 1993). Some stores, like Meijer, expanded even further becoming "hypermarkets" where shoppers could buy groceries as well as auto supplies, clothing, yard tools, etc.

Although few supermarkets became "hypermarkets", or combination stores, as they are now more commonly called, they can be found in many areas ("American food . . ." 1993; Johnson 1989). Meijer's market strategy to offer everything from groceries to lingerie to hardware result in stores of about 35 departments that typically cover over an acre of land (hence their former name, Meijer Thrifty Acres). However, the size of the stores also affected workers' involvement in the strike and functioned as a control mechanism.

Joining the work stoppage often followed departmental lines. We found that the greatest worker involvement occurred in those departments associated with traditional supermarkets. Several non-strikers indicated to us that it was more of a grocery strike. A toy-department worker told us that

The non-grocery area really wouldn't be considered in the strike. . . . Essentially, everything that they [the union] were fighting for raise-wise or getting more full-time positions, things like that, it all had to do with just groceries and cashiers.

Many of the non-grocery workers indicated that union position had relatively little significance to wages and working conditions in their departments.

Technical control embedded in the stores' structure also helped account for non-involvement. Non-strikers' reasons for crossing the picket line varied. Some of the non-strikers we interviewed expressed an anti-union viewpoint; others simply identified more strongly with their departments. Others did not strike because their co-workers failed to support the work stoppage. Given the physical size of the stores, each of the Meijer stores had approximately 500 employees, compared to large supermarkets that employ about 200 workers. Many workers knew few people outside their department. A furniture-department worker told us that he started shortly before the strike and did not know workers from other departments. He worked throughout the strike because everyone in his department stayed and the strike "didn't really affect my department." Without the support of immediate co-workers, some workers did not view striking as an option. A meat-department worker explained that he did not strike because only a few of his co-workers struck. However, he indicated that

if he worked at the Meijer store from which he transferred, he would not have crossed the picket line. Workers in the meat department at that store participated in the strike. Thus, the size of the store and the workers' isolation within departments acted as mechanisms of control, deterring some workers from striking.

Workers who talked to us indicated that Meijer managers used various technology (e.g., computerized check-outs) to evaluate workers (see Braverman 1974: 372). However, they qualified management's use of the information. One cashier explained: "they can't push you too far because they can't make you do something that would injure you. You know, carpal tunnel." But they do use the information as a "guideline." She went on to say that the union plays an important role protecting workers, "acting as a counterbalance" against management.

Bureaucratic Control

The job structure and social relations of the workplace can function as bureaucratic control mechanisms. Different types of bureaucratic controls are used depending on the job. Employers stress company rules to workers in low-level jobs, but reward employees in middle-level jobs for their dependability. Workers at the highest level receive rewards for internalizing the firm's goals and values (Edwards 1979). At Meijer workers receive a company handbook that instructs them on their dress and grooming, how to interact with customers, how to bag items, etc. It also lists 46 actions that workers should avoid from parking in unauthorized areas to theft. The company qualifies their list of prohibited behaviors by indicating that it is impossible to include all inappropriate behaviors. The violation of these work rules may result in disciplinary action, including worker termination. Meijer also has a Policy and Procedures Manual that contains more extensive information on the 46 actions, plus additional company policies and procedures. Workers indicated that some of the company rules were designed to reduce workers' cohesiveness. One service-desk worker explained: "In the store we weren't allowed to even talk to one another unless it was [during] a 15 minute break. . . . So you don't get too close to anybody, they [the managers] would schedule your breaks and lunches with different people at different times. . . ."

Although the Meijer's workforce contained low-level jobs, a store director suggested that Meijer expected their employees to internalize the company's goals and values—a control mechanism associated with high-level jobs (Edwards 1979). He told us that when interviewing applicants he tells them:

Meijer is a tough company [to work for] . . . they have very high standards. Meijer is a perfect place for someone if they have a good work ethic. When they go to work if they give 100 percent of themselves, Meijer is a terrific place for a person like that to work. Someone who works and likes to give 95 percent of themselves, they won't make it at Meijer.

However, this company that demands 100 percent from their workers hires predominately part-time employees. Union rosters of workers for all four Toledo-area Meijer stores show that two months after the strike was settled, 82 percent were classified part-time. A supervisor at one of Meijer's major competitors told us that Kroger stores in the area have approximately 60 percent of employees classified as part-time. In contract negotiation, the UFCW argued for less stringent requirements for full-time status, but with limited results.

The job of specialty clerk and its place in the job hierarchy also was a point of contention in the labor negotiations. These deli, bakery, seafood, and full-service meat-shop workers are among the poorest paid at Meijer—only baggers make less—reflecting their low status in the job hierarchy. In addition, Meijer's pre-strike policies limited specialty clerks' ability to move into better paying jobs (Pakulski 1994d).

Thus, Meijer uses bureaucratic control mechanisms associated with both low-level and high-level workers, part-time and full-time employment, and company rules and guidelines for employee behavior. Although the UFCW supported some modification in the structure of jobs, workers we interviewed found Meijer's list of prohibited behaviors the most frustrating dimension of bureaucratic control.

Customer Controls

Typically, employers and their managers/supervisors exercise control over workers. However, in interactive service jobs,

customers also act as agents of control (Leidner 1993). Fuller and Smith (1991) identified three customer control mechanisms: customer-instigated, company-encouraged, and company-instigated. Customers have always had the power to complain about substandard quality in products or services. When unable to gain satisfaction from sales workers, customers often ask to talk to a manager. The Meijer employee handbook (handbook also) also instructs workers to refer all complaints to the manager-in-charge. Meijer takes customer complaints seriously; a worker may be disciplined if his or her mistake results in a customer complaint.

Companies often encourage customers' input by providing comment cards or toll-free telephone numbers (Fuller and Smith 1991). Meijer has comment cards available at the service desk upon request and a sign that reads: "We care and we want to hear from you," with a toll-free telephone number that customers can call. Another company-instigated method that is popular among retailers is "secret shoppers," individuals hired to anonymously pose as customers to monitor and report on workers' performances (Fuller and Smith 1991). Workers and union officials were unaware if Meijer used secret shoppers. A store director we interviewed would not confirm or refute their use. He said: "Corporately, I cannot answer that question." Later, a university student told us that he had been a secret shopper at Meijer.

Prior research (Benson 1986) on salespeople found that workers often view shoppers "as the enemy," because customers have the potential of exercising control over salespeople. However, Meijer workers often viewed their customers as just part of the job or as their friends and neighbors. Many considered Meijer the outsider. A cashier talked at great length about Meijer's effect on workers, local businesses, and the community as a whole. She went on to say that "the country and the future of my children and their grandchildren are affected by [Meijer's actions]." Many Toledo-area shoppers refused to act as Meijer's agent of worker control by crossing the picket line, which would have undermined workers' power. Data from the University of Toledo 1995 Quality of Life Survey indicates that 58 percent of the respondents did not go to Meijer during the work stoppage (Survey Research Institute 1995). After the strike Meijer admitted to the press that business was off by about 10% ("Meijer, competitors . . ." 1994:

9). However, union supporters did not look kindly on customers who crossed the picket line to shop at Meijer. Picketers shouted at shoppers and tried to block cars from entering the parking lot. One Saturday, other union workers in the Toledo area held a rally to show their support for striking Meijer workers. After an hour-long gathering, hundreds of people moved to the parking lot of a near-by Meijer store. The local newspaper described their protests as raucous and reported shoppers filing complaints about union members' behavior. No serious injuries occurred, and the only arrest took place at another store when a union supporter struck a pick-up truck with his fist (Bates 1994)

At Meijer as in other companies (see Fuller and Smith 1991; Leidner 1993), customers contributed to the control of workers. Although workers did not object to customer controls in the workplace, both union and management understood that customer behavior during the strike was crucial to the interests of both sides.

Gender Controls

Lee (1993) argued that segregation of workers into different jobs may be the most important form of gender-based control, although other workplace contexts also may be gendered (Acker 1990; Martin and Harkreader 1993). Meijer workers are segregated by gender within multiple contexts. Although women constitute 64 percent of the workforce in the four Toledo-area Meijer stores, only three departments—liquor (60 percent female), toys, and gas station (both 67 percent female)—had similar gender compositions. Several departments were completely segregated. Four departments—infant and children's apparel, women's apparel, home fashion, and gifts and floral—were staffed exclusively by women workers. Plumbing, paint, and hardware had only had male workers. While other departments may not be totally male or female, they were far from integrated. In 27 of the 36 departments one gender dominated, comprising at least 70 percent of the workers (see Jacobs 1989).

The segregation that exists among Meijer workers mirrors the divisions between men and women in these sales occupations in the entire labor force. For example, women dominate apparel sales at both Meijer (97.9 percent female) and in the labor force

(81.3 percent female; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). Hardware and building supplies are predominately male. While men comprise 87 percent of the occupation's workforce in the labor force (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992), they monopolize the positions at Meijer; the 23 hardware workers at the four Meijer stores are all men. Other Meijer departments vary from the national occupational statistics. Shoe sales is fairly well integrated, with women representing 62 percent of the U.S. workforce (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992). However, at Meijer the shoe department hires predominantly women workers (88 percent female).

It appears that the division of men and women into different work areas at Meijer equals or exceeds the segregation that exists in the entire labor force. Segregation hides the fact that employers and managers use gender-specific control mechanisms (Smith 1994); workers are not treated differently because of their gender but because they work in different departments. Previous research (Talbert and Bose 1977) on retail clerks found that men reported less supervision and greater discretion in their work than female clerks. We found that men at Meijer complained slightly less than women about close surveillance—a form of direct control—at work.

The separation of men and women into different jobs contributes to a gender hierarchy in authority (Ehrenreich and Fuentes 1981; Lee 1993). On the Meijer organizational chart, departments are subsumed under four lines—grocery, service, soft lines, and hard lines. Each store has a manager that oversees these lines, and the manager often reflects the gender composition of the line's workforce. The soft line, the most highly segregated line with 81 percent women workers, is head by a female manager in each of the four stores. The service line that employs slightly more male workers than the soft line (70 compared to 81 percent female, respectively), is managed by a man in one of the four stores. In the other three stores, women head-up the service line. Hard-line managers, whose workforces are 53 percent female, are evenly split; two stores have a male manager, while the two other stores have a female manager in hard lines. One of the female, hard-line managers recently moved into that position from grocery, leaving the grocery-line manager position vacant. The three other grocery-line managers are men, while 59 percent of grocery workers are women.

Besides each store having four line managers, each also has a night manager and a store director. Men dominate these positions, occupying them in three of four stores. The store that had a woman director and a woman night manager also had predominately women line managers; only one line manager (i.e., grocery) was male. Thus, men and women managers are segregated between stores. Although women are over-represented in management in one store, in the other three establishments men dominate the top management positions. These male managers institute control mechanisms to direct, evaluate, and sanction a workforce that is 64 percent female.

If Meijer management thought hiring mostly female workers would make for more docile workforce, it appears they were mistaken. Many women workers at Meijer are strong union supporters and actively participated in the strike. Some took leadership roles, acting as picket captains and union stewards. In fact, women are more likely to be union stewards than men. Of the 15 stewards identified on the union rosters, 11 were women. Although the authority structure at Meijer is gendered, women workers are not reluctant to serve their unions or question the control mechanisms of management. Nevertheless, gender segregation per se never came up in interviews. To a remarkable degree, the highly gender-segregated, Meijer job structure elicited no comment from Meijer workers, nor were treatment issues framed in gender terms by our respondents.

The Impact of the Strike on Workplace Control

Strikes challenge and often interrupt management control, although as the Meijer case indicates management may continue to try to control workers' behavior through the course of a work stoppage. Workers differed in their assessment of the impact of the strike on Meijer's use of direct control. Some strikers thought that things had not changed much. One non-striker commented that the strikers "went out in vain." Some strikers also thought little had changed. After coming back to work after the strike, two workers in the cash office believed that management was punishing them for their strike activities by assigning them to cash registers. They were told that working in the cash office was a privilege, that it appeared they no longer deserved. Others

indicated that they were now treated more fairly. Some non-strikers also indicated a change among managers. However, from their perspectives it was for the worse. A man who moved from automotive to cashier said: "They more or less really treat you just like an employee, before [the strike ended] they kind of treated you like they were grateful you were working there." Thus, it appears that the strike reduced, although did not eliminate, aspects of direct control, to the approval of some workers but to the dislike of others.

Although striking workers did not complain as vehemently about other means of control, we found that some elements of technical and bureaucratic control did change. Meijer's size, structure, and work rules that minimized worker contact with each other produced a fractionalized workforce. However, both striking workers and union officials indicated that the strike brought workers from different shifts and departments together. As one worker explained, before the strike

you knew their name; you knew where they worked; and that's all you knew about them. On the picket line, we got to know them as people, as friends. We got to know their families, their husbands, how many kids they had, what their problems were. They listened to what your problems were. So it gave us a chance to get a lot closer. And I think Meijer is going to regret that.

Union representation also modified some bureaucratic control that management had instituted. Several workers reported that the elements of the contract that they liked dealt with grievance and arbitration procedures and seniority rules.

The UFCW was able to reduce some aspects of control that Meijer management had imposed on its workers. However, the union also placed restrictions on Meijer workers. The stores were "closed shops," requiring all workers to join the UFCW. Those workers whose pay did not increase under the strike settlement lost money, as they gave up part of their pay checks to union dues. Among those in the non-grocery areas in particular, workers did not feel the union was representing their interests because the UFCW did not push for as high of wages in non-grocery areas as in grocery departments. The union argued that Meijer should pay wages similar to their competition, both well-paying, union-

ized supermarket and non-unionized discount stores that paid considerably less. Unable to justify Meijer paying non-grocery workers more than its competitors, the union may have had no other choice but to support this two-tiered system and thereby undermine worker solidarity.

Other workers complained that the union's success in negotiating a provision that made it easier for a part-timer to become full-time actually hurt them. The settlement stipulated the number of hours an employee could work before management must change his or her status to full-time. During the strike, management allowed non-strikers to work additional hours to help staff the store. When the strike ended and the union supporters returned, non-strikers had their hours reduced. Instead of increasing the number of full-time workers, this clause in the contract resulted in management cutting workers' hours to keep employees from being reclassified as "full-time." In addition, management's more lenient overtime practices only lasted as long as the strike. One grocery employee who worked throughout the work stoppage reported getting as many as 75 hours a week. He blamed the union for the reduction in overtime and complained that he "can't survive on 40 hours" per week, while accepting the low wage rate paid by Meijer.

Other mechanisms of control were not points of contention and did not seem to change. Although we found that customer control reinforced other mechanisms of control, neither workers or union officials we interviewed complained about the use of customer controls. Customer satisfaction is such an essential part of the retail philosophy that perhaps workers view these mechanisms as fundamental to the maintenance of their jobs. In the same way, gender differences are so ingrained (Reskin and Padavic 1994), managers and workers seemed unaware of how gender affected the ways that the workforce was directed, evaluated, and sanctioned.

Conclusion

Mechanisms of control affected both the formation of the strike and its outcome. The strike was, in part, a struggle over the means by which management obtained work from its employees.

As expected, workers objected most strenuously to direct control mechanisms. Indirect mechanisms of control played a less visible role in the strike, yet they had an impact on the work stoppage. Meijer's size, structure, and work rules produced a fractionalized workforce that allowed management to take a tough stand in negotiations.

When the strike finally ended, the settlement provided workers with few gains. However, some elements of control were altered. UFCW representation gave workers some protection against management's arbitrary use of power and provided union input on grievance and promotion procedures. Being together on the picket line also gave union supporters the opportunity to become closer, reducing the isolation they had felt as workers before the strike. Although other mechanisms of control did not change after the strike, systems of control are dynamic. They are the outcome of the continuing struggle between management and workers (see Edwards 1986; Gottfried 1992). While the strike and its outcome affected some means of control, they were not permanently established. The future interaction between management, workers, and the UFCW will continue to define and redefine the system of control at these stores.

It is, however, interesting to speculate about how issues of control at these Meijer stores compare with other establishments. Like workers in general, the Meijer's workforce resisted direct control mechanisms (Edwards 1979). Indeed, as long as employers and individual managers act arbitrarily and inconsistently, we can expect workers and their unions to object. Historically, as workers began to rebel against direct controls, employers and managers instituted a variety of indirect means of control. Workers and their unions have attempted to resist some of these indirect mechanisms, focusing primarily on technical and bureaucratic controls. Similar to the victories unions have won protecting workers on assembly lines from technical control, we found that the UFCW provides protection from management's imposing high scanning rates for merchandise on cashiers. Unions, including the UFCW, have also gained input regarding bureaucratic controls through the shaping of promotion and grievance procedures. However, other elements of controls, such as the size of the store in the UFCW versus Meijer case, are less easily addressed in contract

negotiations. Furthermore, in retailing customer controls tend to be accepted by workers and their unions as “givens,” while gender segregation is so entrenched in the Meijer and national labor forces that neither side of the labor conflict recognized it as a means of worker control.

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